

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 1130

By Cooper B

A RESOLUTION commemorating the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike of 1968.

WHEREAS, on February 12, 1968, 1,300 sanitation workers for the City of Memphis walked off the job, launching a strike that would play a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, while the 1,300 sanitation workers were officially petitioning Memphis for union recognition, dues checkoffs, and 10-cent raises, in reality, their struggle was for much more--basic rights, dignity, and respect; and

WHEREAS, forty years ago, the sanitation workers of Memphis worked under deplorable conditions; called "walking buzzards" by their fellow citizens, they carried the City's refuse in leaky tubs riddled with holes for a weekly wage that failed to raise the workers above the poverty level, although they worked forty hours a week; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2007 book *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* by Michael Honey, life for black Memphians in the 1960s was a never-ending struggle, with 58 percent of African-American families living in poverty--10 percent above the national average; and

WHEREAS, frustrated by the Jim Crow laws that marginalized and diminished their race, the African-American sanitation workers sought to redress the inequities they had for so long suffered; and

WHEREAS, the strike's slogan, "I Am a Man," boldly emblazoned on signs carried by the striking men, represented the basic demand of members of the black community, male and female alike, to be treated as citizens with equal rights; and

WHEREAS, the 1,300 sanitation workers, led by T. O. Jones, staged regular marches, with Reverend James Lawson and many other local ministers helping organize nonviolent action, at a time when urban riots roiled cities and destroyed communities; and

WHEREAS, on March 18, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the champion of the Civil Rights Movement, made his first appearance in Memphis in support of the strike, at the behest of Reverend Lawson; and

WHEREAS, Dr. King returned ten days later on March 28, 1968, to lead a march, but it turned into chaos when youths unaffiliated with the strike began breaking storefront windows and police responded with force; and

WHEREAS, determined to lead a successful, nonviolent mass march, Dr. King returned to Memphis for a third time in early April, but instead he was tragically assassinated on April 4, 1968, outside the Lorraine Hotel; and

WHEREAS, on April 16, 1968, Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb agreed to a settlement very similar to the original one proffered by the strikers, thus ending the 65-day strike; and

WHEREAS, this uprising of the urban poor transformed ordinary men into extraordinary heroes who endeavored to right the wrongs of years of racism in the South and improve the quality of life for all men and women, regardless of race; and

WHEREAS, thirty of the 1,300 men who initiated the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike remain employed by the City of Memphis; some of those men who participated in the strike are Nathaniel Broome, H. B. Crockett, Ruffin Dickerson, Percy Farmer, Earl Gales, Richard Garrett, Johnnie Hardeman, Jimmie Hill, Robert Hobson, Luther Houston, Booker T. Johnson, Ben Jones, Baxter Leach, James Manuel, Leslie Moore, Elmore Nickleberry, Herbert Parson, James Robinson, Taylor Rogers, Willie A. Sain, Alvin Turner, Russell Walton, Joe Warren, and Ozell Ueal; and

WHEREAS, now, forty years later, it is fitting that this General Assembly honor those courageous and principled men who fought against injustice to secure a better tomorrow for themselves, their families, their community, and all future generations; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, that we commemorate the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike, honoring those brave men whose determination and conviction led to social and economic change for the African-American community in Memphis.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.